

Rehab Institute breaks ground on new research hospital

BY MEENAKSHI DALAL Staff Reporter mdalal@suntimes.com July 1, 2013 12:38PM



Rosetta Robertson, 73, demonstrates Hand in Glove technology developed at the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago for stroke or brain injury patients. Robertson began therapy when this technology was in its infancy, seven years ago. | Meenakshi Dalal-Sun-Times

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U.S. Sen. Mark Kirk grabbed a shovel and broke ground Monday at the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago's new \$550 million research hospital. Kirk underwent treatment last year at the RIC after a debilitating stroke.

The 26-floor facility set to open in 2016 will be located at 630 N. McClurg Court under a new name: The Ability Institute of RIC.

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The 1.2 million-square-foot hospital will have 242 beds. There will be 900,000 square feet of clinical and research space available in the facility.

It will feature AbilityLabs, a new method of care that integrates research and treatment.

The idea is to increase collaboration between clinicians, researchers, scientists, engineers and patients, said chief medical officer at RIC, Dr. James Sliwa.

"Physical proximity counts," said chief scientist and vice president of research Dr. Zev Rymer.

Before the groundbreaking ceremony, RIC staff demonstrated some of their latest research ranging from a bionic arm to speech therapy technology.

There were also several patient success stories shared, including Kirk's. During his speech he stood alongside the 11-year old stroke patient he'd befriended in rehabilitation to loud bursts of applause as they demonstrated their arms' range of motion together. Kirk was able to lift his hand to shoulder height, while Jackson Cunningham of Oakwood swung his left arm high up into the air.

Later, he praised the facility and staff for helping him in his recovery. In January - a year after he suffered the stroke - he climbed the U.S. Capitol steps.

"Without (the RIC) I would not have climbed those 45 steps to the senate door," Kirk said at one point at the event.

U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin and Mayor Rahm Emanuel also attended groundbreaking.